

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 ISO-00 ACDA-07 OMB-01 CIAE-00 DODE-00
PM-04 H-01 INR-07 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01
SP-02 SS-15 NSCE-00 SSO-00 USIE-00 INRE-00 /070 W
-----190638 108985 /20

O R 190510Z FEB 77
FM AMEMBASSY MUSCAT
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 2948
INFO AMEMBASSY LONDON

S E C R E T MUSCAT 0263

PLEASE PASS TO SECRETARY'S PARTY FOR ASST. SECRETARY ATHERTON
FROM AMB. WOLLE

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PFOR MU US UK
SUBJECT: MASIRAH ISLAND

1. DURING DISCUSSION WITH ME NIGHT OF FEB 17 FOREIGN MINISTER ZAWAWI EXPRESSED TO ME WITH UNCUSTOMARY VIGOR AND OBVIOUS SENSE OF FRUSTRATION HIS DISMAY, BOTH OFFICIAL AND PERSONAL, AT LENGTH OF TIME WE HAVE TAKEN TO GET BACK TO OMANIS INDICATING WHAT, IF ANY, USE WE WISH TO MAKE OF MASIRAH AFTER MARCH 31. RECALLING THAT SEVEN MONTHS HAVE PASSED SINCE WE WORKED OUT WITH OMANIS AND BRITISH ARRANGEMENTS FOR INTERIM SERIES OF P-3 FLIGHTS, AND FOUR MONTHS HAVE GONE BY SINCE HIS MEETING WITH YOU IN NEW YORK, HE STRESSED THAT WHILE OMAN REMAINS FULLY PREPARED TO WORK WITH US TO MUTUAL ADVANTAGE ON POSSIBLE FUTURE ARRANGEMENTS HE AND HIS COLLEAGUES "AND HM AS WELL" HAD EXPECTED TO HEAR WELL BEFORE THIS WHAT WE HAVE IN MIND FOR THE ISLAND FROM APRIL ONWARD.

2. OF HIGHEST IMMEDIATE PRIORITY, SAID ZAWAWI, IS NECESSITY FOR US TO INFORM OMAN OFFICIALLY ABOUT THE SPECIFIC FUEL, MECHANICAL, BILLETING AND OTHER REQUIREMENTS WHICH OUR
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AIRCRAFT WOULD NEED FROM APRIL FIRST ON. HE STATED FLATLY THAT NEITHER OMAN GOVT, NOR SULTAN'S AIR FORCE COMMAND HAS BEEN ABLE TO LEARN THIS RUDIMENTARY INFORMATION FROM RAF OR BRITISH GOVT. AS THINGS STAND, HE SAID, AND WITH APRIL FIRST BARELY SIX WEEKS AWAY, OMAN MIGHT BE IN POSITION OF TURNING US DOWN ON FUTURE FLIGHTS, AT LEAST FOR A TIME, SIMPLY BECAUSE IT HAS BEEN UNABLE DUE TO LACK OF INFORMATION TO PLAN

AHEAD TO HAVE THE REQUISITE TYPE AND QUANTITY OF FUEL ON HAND, AS WELL AS STARTERS, ASSOCIATED EQUIPMENT, MESSING FACILITIES AND THE LIKE ABOVE AND BEYOND THE VARIOUS LOGISTICAL GEAR THEY NEED FOR THEIR OWN FLIGHTS AND PILOT TRMINING OPERATIONS. (ALL THIS, HE POINTED OUT, WAS ON ASSUMPTION WHICH HE ADMITTED MAY WELL BE WRONG THAT THERE IS CONSIDERABLE LIKELIHOOD OF USG WANTING TO CONTINUE SOME FREQUENCY OF P-3 OR OTHER FLIGHTS, AND TO DO SO ON BASIS OF CONTINUITY WITH PATTERN OF LAST 7 OR 8 MONTHS.)

3. RESPONDING, I STATED NO ONE COULD DENY WE HAD TAKEN UNUSUALLY LONG TIME TO COME TO GRIPS WITH THIS SUBJECT - ESPECIALLY CONSIDERING IT WAS OUR OWN INITIATIVE AND DATED BACK MORE THAN TWO YEARS. I REPEATED WHAT I HAD TOLD HIM FEW MINUTES EARLIER ON SUBJECT OF MASIRAH, NAMELY THAT MY RECENT CONSULTATION IN DEPARTMENT HAD MADE PLAIN THAT CONCERNED USG AGENCIES SUCH AS STATE AND DEFENSE ARE NOT VERY ACTIVELY ENGAGED IN STUDYING POSSIBLE FUTURE USE OF MASIRAH. WE REALIZED WE HAD NOT YET WORKED OUT WITH OMAN ANY BAZUS FOR POSSIBLE USE OF THE ISLAND AFTER MAR 77. I SAID THAT ONTHE SPECIFIC QUESTION OF LOGISTICAL REQUIREMENTS (PARA 2) I PERSONALLY WAS SURPRISED OMANI AIR FORCE HAD NOT LEARNED THIS IS COURSE OF ONGOING TURNOVER BY RAF, AND I WOULD DO MY UTMOST TO GET INTO HIS HANDS IN A MATTER OF DAYS A PIECE OF PAPER THAT WOULD SPELL THIS OUT TO ASSIST IN OMANI FORWARD CONTINGENCY PLANNING.

4. ZAWAWI THEN LAUNCHED INOTJA FRUSTRATED, ALMOST BITTER, RECOUNTING OF PRACTICAL DIFFICULTIES THAT HAVE ARISEN IN
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RECENT WEEKS WITH BRITISH IN COURSE OF RAF EVACUATION STEPS. HE SPOKE OF ARGUMENTS, BOTH ON MASIRAH AND WITH BRITISH EMBASSY HERE, OVER WHAT CONSTITUTES MOVABLE AS AGAINST IMMOVABLE ASSETS, AND OF HIDEBOUND LONDON DETERMINATION TO PACK UP AND TAKE AWAY THE LAST LITTLE ITEM OR TO CHARGE INEXPLICABLY HIGH PRICES TO THE OMANIS IF THEY ARE LEFT BEHIND. SAID THAT AS RECENTLY AS FEB 15 WHEN BRITISH AMBASSADOR HAD COME TO HIM WITH GRUDGING AGREEMENT STAFFED OUT RIGHT UP TO CABINET LEVEL IN LONDON TO REDUCE BILL BY ONE HUNDRED THOUSAND POUNDS STERLING (WHICH ZAWAWI OBVIOUSLY CONSIDERED AS SO SMALL A REDUCTION THAT IT WAS SOMETHING OF A SLAP IN THE FACE) HE HAD THEREUPON THANKED AMBASSADOR FOR THIS GESTURE BUT ADDED THAT OMANGOV IN RECOGNITION OF BRITAIN'S DEPLETED ECONOMIC SITUATION NOW REGRETTEED EVEN HAVING ASKED FOR A REDUCTION AND WOULD BE PAYING THE FULL BILL ORIGINALLY PRESENTED. (COMMENT: SEEMS TO ME ZAWAWI'S FRUSTRATION OVER THESE TURNOVER PROBLEMS SERVED TO ADD INTENSITY TO HIS SURPRISINGLY STRONG REMARKS ABOUT OUR OWN DELAYS, AND INDEED HE CAME CLOSE TO ADMITTING AS MUCH.)

5. RECOMMENDATIONS:

A. I WOULD LIKE TO RECEIVE INSTRUCTIONS JUST AS SOON AS HUMANLY POSSIBLE TO PRESENT ZAWAWI, IN WRITING, A DETAILED LISTING OF THE LOGISTICAL REQUIREMENTS OVER P-3 AIRCRAFT HAVE HAD IN PRESENT SERIES OF FLIGHTS TO MASIRAH. THIS MAY ENABLE OMANIS TO RETAIN AT THE AIRFIELD SOME ITEMS THAT RAF WOULD OTHERWISE REMOVE IN NEXT FEW WEEKS. WOULD WISH HAI THIS FOR HIM BY FEB 22 OR 23 WHEN I ANTICIPATE SEEKING APPOINMENT TO REPORT TO HIM ON THIS WEEKEND'S MEETING IN RIYADH.

B. I URGE THAT WASHINGTON COME TO DECISION AT EARLIEST POSSIBLE MONEMT ON WHETHER WE WANT TO CONTINUE P-3 FLIGHTS, AND POSSIBLE COMMENCE OTHERS, SO THAT I CAN BEGIN NEGOTIATING THIS WITH OMAN-GOV BY END OF FEBRUARY OR VERY EARLY MARCH. UNLESS WE CAN DO THIS, I JUDGE THERE IS REAL POSSIBILITY THAT P-3 FLIGHTS WILL NOT
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ENJOY THE CONTINUITY WE MIGHT WISH.

6. AM OF COURSE PREPARED DISCUSS ALL THIS IN RIYADH WITH THOSE CONCERNED.
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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01-Jan-1994 12:00:00 am
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: LANDING RIGHTS
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Sent Date: 19-Feb-1977 12:00:00 am
Decaption Date: 01-Jan-1960 12:00:00 am
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 22 May 2009
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1977MUSCAT00263
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Expiration:
Film Number: D770059-0934
Format: TEL
From: MUSCAT
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1977/newtext/t19770225/aaaaavlu.tel
Line Count: 144
Litigation Code IDs:
Litigation Codes:
Litigation History:
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Message ID: d05df2c3-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Office: ACTION NEA
Original Classification: SECRET
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 3
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: SECRET
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: n/a
Retention: 0
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 18-Mar-2005 12:00:00 am
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review Media Identifier:
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
SAS ID: 3274839
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: MASIRAH ISLAND
TAGS: PFOR, OCLR, MPOL, MU, US, UK
To: STATE
Type: TE
vdkgvwkey: odb://SAS/SAS.dbo.SAS_Docs/d05df2c3-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Review Markings:
Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
22 May 2009
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 22 May 2009